

Migraines are thought to be caused by the dilation and constriction of arteries in the head. These can be extremely painful headaches. The pain is often limited to one side of the head, and may be accompanied by nausea and vomiting.

Most often, visual migraine, just like regular migraine headaches, can be brought about by stress, fatigue and changing estrogen levels. It occurs more often in females and more often during adolescence and menopause. On rare occasions these visual attacks are associated with other more serious problems.

Ocular or visual migraine is the most common type of migraine. It is believed to be caused by the same problem that leads to classical migraine: vascular spasm. Instead of the spasm affecting the surface of the brain, these episodes affect the ocular blood supply or the blood supply to the vision center in the brain. Generally, people don't associate this visual distress with migraine because migraine is commonly associated with headaches. But one can have a visual migraine with no headache at all (although 40-50% of visual migraines are associated with a mild headache shortly after the vision clears.)

The symptoms for ocular migraines include blurred vision usually more on one eye. The blurriness is unique because there might be an awareness of something happening in the blurred area, like shimmering, or flashes, or heat waves rising off a hot roadway. This kind of blurriness is called a positive scotoma (blind spot). It is termed as positive because there is something happening in the blind spot that we see. It typically begins in the peripheral vision, and usually consists of a semi-circular, jagged, shimmering light, which enlarges and becomes more central. After ten to thirty minutes, the disturbance just fades away. The visual disruption is caused by spasm and dilatation of small blood vessels in the part of the brain where vision is processed. The sufferer may or may not feel a mild headache over the brow area after the disturbance. Many ocular migraine sufferers complain only of fatigue after the visual disturbance.

In many cases, migraines are believed to be brought on by stress. "Friday night" headache often follows the stress relief of a frenetic week during which the blood vessels in the head relax and constrict. Visual migraines usually occur after extended periods of reading, watching television, computer work, or other close work that requires the eyes. This type of headache usually disappears after a period of rest. In some cases, headaches may be caused by eyestrain related to eyeglasses. Doctors will routinely record a complete history and perform thorough physical checking to rule out systemic causes of the migraine. Ophthalmologists should be consulted to verify that no eye-related problems are bringing on the headache. Stress relief, control of blood pressure, or medications to maintain appropriate hormone levels may also be necessary. New glasses or different work lighting may be also prescribed by your doctor. Proper care of the body, a well-balanced diet, proper lifestyle choices and regular exercise may also help reduce visual migraines.

In these busy times, we may take persistent headaches for granted. After all, we are living in an environment where stress is nothing out of the norm. But don't be too careless, if you feel something wrong, be it a simple headache, or a short dizzy spell, consult a health professional immediately for proper medical evaluation.

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